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ABSTRACT

Public broadcasting increased the number of programs for older children during the 1994-95 television season. Data from the Yankelovich Youth Monitor, a survey of 1,211 subjects aged 6 to 17 years, provide some information about response to these programs and give some insight into serving the 9 to 11 age group in particular. Television continued to be a significant part of the lives of American children, with the average child reporting viewing nearly 20 hours of television a week. About 23 percent of all children aged 6 to 11 years are using television at any time between 4:30 and 6 p.m. Children regard public broadcasting as generally suitable for family viewing. However, adding programs targeting older children has not increased their viewing. Older children remembered their preschool viewing favorably. While their viewing of public broadcasting has not increased with the additional programming, they are aware of these programs and are not neglecting them because of lack of awareness. It appears that stations can use their facilities and community ties to create activities that encourage public television viewing. (SLD)

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Reaching Older Kids with Public Television

PBS increased the number of programs for older children in the 1994-95 television season. How did these programs rate with kids? Data from the Yankelovich Youth Monitor may provide some insights to public television programmers about serving the six to eleven age group.[1]

CPB commissioned Yankelovich to ask kids questions about viewership of public television programs and their reaction to the idea of kids' clubs on television in the follow-up telephone survey to the general interview. While the questions in the telephone survey could only be asked of kids aged 9-17, the data provide useful information, especially for kids aged 9-11.

As suggested in previous Monitor studies, television continues to be a significant part of children's lives. The average child reports viewing television nearly 20 hours per week. This self-reported number by kids compares closely to the Nielsen reported average viewing of 6-11 year olds of 21.5 hours of viewing per week.[2] According to the Youth Monitor, television plays a significant role as a source of information for kids: it's their number one source for news and current events and for finding out about new songs or bands.

When do kids watch television?

Kids watch a lot of television after school. After homework, watching television is the most mentioned activity between school and dinner time for all kids. For 6-8 year-olds it's the number one activity after school. According to Nielsen data, about 23 percent of all kids aged 6-11 are using television at any time between 4:30 and 6 pm. Placing the older kids' programs in the after-school time slot makes sense even though there is tough competition on some commercial networks.

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[1] The Yankelovich Youth Monitor study is an in-home interview study of 1,211 young people aged 6-17 conducted in late 1994 through January 1995. It is a nationally projectable sample. CPB's proprietary questions were asked in a telephone call back sample of 9-17 year-olds.

[2] National Audience Demographic Report A.C. Nielsen, November, 1994.

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It is important to remember that kids are also a large part of the prime time audience, particularly in the early part of prime time. Nielsen data indicates that about 30 percent of kids aged 6-11 are in the prime time television audience. While most of the programs targeted to children on PBS air during daytime hours, a great deal of children's viewing of television in general is during prime time evening hours. Nearly forty-nine percent of the kids reported usually watching television with their families in the evening. Among the younger children in the survey the percentages were higher: 56 percent of 6-8 year-olds and 52 percent of 9-11 year olds watch with their families.

In the 1993 survey CPB asked specifically about viewing in the 8 pm time slot. CPB again asked the question about the eight o'clock time period, and 54 percent of the 9-17 year olds reported viewing TV last night at 8 pm. More boys reported viewing than did girls. And, nearly 60 percent of the 9-11 year olds reported viewing. These findings are similar to the 1993 survey.

About one-third said they were viewing alone. This percentage was higher among older children; only 17 percent of the 9-11 year-olds reported viewing alone. This is probably because older kids are more likely to have television sets in their rooms. Sixty-seven percent of the 16-17 year olds have television sets in their own rooms. About 42 percent of the sample indicated viewing with parents, with about 48 percent of the 9-11 year-olds reporting viewing with parents.

When asked about viewing PBS with their families, more than half reported watching programs on PBS together, and nearly 60 percent of the 9-11 year olds watched PBS with their parents. Even higher percentages of African-American and Hispanic kids reported watching PBS with their families.

These data reflect the image of public television as presenting programming suitable for family viewing. Other national surveys of adults have indicated the value of public television for family and children's viewing. In a recent survey 68 percent of adults rated public television as better than all or most other networks (broadcast and cable) at providing programming that the whole family can enjoy.[3] In the same survey 78 percent of the adults rated public television as better than all or most other networks in providing good programming for children.

Kids think TV has too much violence

The number of kids who think there's too much violence on television has increased since the 1993 survey. Among the 9-11 year-olds 80 percent now say there is too much

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[3] Yankelovich Omnibus survey, May 1995, conducted by telephone of 1,114 adults nationwide.

violence on television, compared to 74 percent in 1993. As in prior surveys, girls are more likely than boys to find television too violent.

Adults have become increasingly concerned about violence on television and its effects on children. In a survey conducted in November 1993, 62 percent of the adult population expressed concern over violence on television.[4] Yet they found public television to be far less violent than cable or other broadcast television. In the recent Yankelovich Omnibus survey, three out of four adults rated public television better than all or most other television networks (both broadcast and cable) at providing programming that is free from violence.

Providing programming for older kids

In the fall of 1994 PBS added more programs for older kids to the schedule. *Where in the World is Carmen Sandiego?* and *Ghostwriter* aired in the prior season. *The Magic School Bus* and *Bill Nye, The Science Guy* were added. The strategy to increase older kids' viewing was to increase the number of older children's offerings, thereby allowing stations to offer a "block" of older kids' programs that would appeal to school-age children.

In the callback part of the Youth Monitor survey, kids were asked about their viewing of PBS. Three-fourths of those in the survey said they watched the channel, and an even higher percentage of 9-11 year-olds watched.

Percentage of kids who have watched:	
Carmen Sandiego	73.7
Ghostwriter	67.5
Bill Nye, the Science Guy	43.6
The Magic School Bus	30.5

Then they were asked about the four programs. Not surprisingly, responses showed that the programs which had aired longer had higher reported viewership. *Carmen Sandiego* had the highest viewership with 74 percent of 9-11 year-olds having watched *Carmen Sandiego*.

Boys were far more likely to report watching *Bill Nye;* in the 9-11 age range 55 percent of boys watched compared to 32 percent of girls. A significantly lower portion of students in the C/D grade range report ever watching *Bill Nye* — only 24 percent.

Those who didn't watch any of the above offered opinions as to why they didn't watch. While 15 percent said the programs were boring or for younger kids, all of these responses came from kids in the 12 or older category. Since the programs are intended for younger children, this was not surprising. Nearly half of the 9-11 year olds could not

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[4]CPB study: "Perceptions of Balance and Objectivity in Public Broadcasting," Lauer, Lalley & Associates, Inc. and Public Opinion Strategies LP, November 1993, telephone survey of 1,000 adults nationwide.

come up with an answer as to why they didn't watch. Fifteen percent indicated that they were unaware of the programs.

Of those who watched the programs, more than one-fourth volunteered that they watched the programs because they were educational. Twenty-four percent volunteered that they thought the programs were "fun." Among 9-11 year olds, the programs were considered fun by nearly 32 percent, and about 29 percent said they watched because the programs were educational.

The fairly even split between "educational" and "fun" perceptions of the programs indicates that the programs are achieving the goal of being educational *and* fun to watch. Education doesn't necessarily mean dull. In fact, in the Youth Monitor, 88 percent of the children say they like school.

Eighty-four percent of the kids surveyed indicated that they watched PBS programs. Kids with self-reported grades in the C or D range watched far less PBS programming.

Adding more programs to the older children's schedule was intended to increase older kids' viewing. So far, ratings data indicate that has not happened. In fact, the daytime ratings for children in the 6-11 age range *dropped* 18 percent from the 1993-94 season to the 1994-95 season. While this drop is disappointing to programmers and producers, the responses from the Youth Monitor paint a less negative picture.

Kids' clubs

To enhance the block of children's programs, some stations have kids' clubs. CPB asked kids in the survey about these kids' clubs to see if the idea was of interest to them.

Nearly three-fourths of the kids had heard of a television kids' club, but the proportion of kids reporting actual membership was less than ten percent.

The things kids value most about kids' clubs are the possibility of being on television or having their letters or drawings on television. Eighty-seven percent of kids ages 9-11 thought that being on television would be a "very important" benefit for a kids' club. More than half of them were very interested in having their letters or drawings on television and getting pictures of people on their favorite shows. Getting a game and entering contests had higher appeal among the lowest-income households.

Kids' Clubs

Activities or benefits with appeal to kids ranked as "very important" to 9-11 year-olds.

1. Being on television
2. Having your letters or drawings on TV
3. Getting pictures of people on your favorite shows
4. Going to special kids' club parties
5. Getting a game
6. Entering contests
7. Getting stickers, pencils or small gifts
8. Getting a newsletter

The most highly valued activities are those that public television stations with their local presence in the community are well-positioned to do. Stations that have an interest in promoting kids' clubs might think about how they can offer kids some of these activities.

In the fall PBS will be offering some new interstitial material with a game motif for older kids' programs. This material will allow for customization by local stations, with opportunity to insert information or promotions from kids' clubs and other local events. This material will provide a seamless look to the older kids' block of programming. The gameboard environment inhabited by animated game pieces will provide an appealing addition to the programs themselves. Playing the "game" on PBS is designed to offer an added attraction to children.

Older kids' view of preschool viewing

When asked about prior viewing of programs aimed at preschoolers, more than 60 percent reported watching *Sesame Street* or *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* or *Reading Rainbow*. A lower percentage reported viewing either *Lamb Chops' Play-Along* or *Shining Time Station*, most likely because these are newer programs that would not have aired when this age group was in the target preschool age range.

Ninety-two percent of girls in the 16-17 age group reported ever viewing *Sesame Street*. Recall of viewing to the preschool programs was also higher among higher income families. The earlier question about current viewing of PBS programs in general showed a reverse trend with respect to income; *i.e.* the higher income households were *less* likely to view. Nielsen audience data has also shown a high percentage of children in disadvantaged households viewing these programs, so the recall data indicating higher viewership of *Sesame Street* among higher income families appears to be puzzling.

Recall of viewing the preschool programs was also higher among A students. All four programs had progressively lower recalled viewing as reported grades declined. Other research indicates that viewing of these programs has a positive effect on school performance in the early years. While the research has not been able to track later school performance with viewing of the preschool programs, these data indicate some correlation of viewing and school performance in the upper grade levels.

When asked if they think that they learned something from these programs, the respondents were overwhelmingly positive. Eighty-four percent of 9-11 year olds found that they learned something. There was no significant difference in reported learning across income groups or education of the parent. The highest percentages were for A students, African-American youth, and girls ages 16-17.

Conclusions

While disappointing ratings for the older kids' programs in the 1994-95 season may discourage some public broadcasting managers, the results of other surveys offer an alternative view. Parents equate public television with offering educational and excellent programming for children. They find public television to be a haven from violence and a channel for family viewing. In the Yankelovich Omnibus survey adults overwhelmingly support public television's efforts to provide programming for older children. Ninety percent of those surveyed agreed that public television should be providing more programming for children beyond the preschool years.

Kids are aware of PBS and the programs offered.

Children have found the programs on PBS. The Youth Monitor shows clearly that kids are familiar with the programs. They are *not* not viewing because of lack of awareness.

Kids find the programs both educational and fun.

They have positive comments to make about what draws them to the programs. There is not a strong perception of PBS as the "baby channel" or a "boring" channel among the target age groups.

Kids' clubs offer stations opportunities.

Stations can use their facilities and community ties to their advantage in creating appealing kids' activities and surrounding the kids' blocks of programming with a unique look.

If you have questions about these data, please refer them to Janice Jones, (202) 879-9677, fax (202) 783-1019, or e-mail jjones@cpb.org. We also welcome any comments and recommendations about how to make the data more useful to you.